



Farrell's Saw Me For What I Could Be

December 2011: I was 206 lbs., pushing 40 and feeling empty and embarrassed. My whole life was being colored by how I felt about my body, and that color was a dark, dull gray. When I was walking up stairs, I wondered if people were looking at the size of my butt. When I was playing with my kids, I just wanted to collapse onto the couch like a lump. If I saw an old high school friend at the store, I'd dodge into the next aisle to avoid being seen. I didn't even want my husband to see me or touch me, because I felt like my body was so unattractive. I wore an enormous XXL gray sweatshirt every day, over every outfit, like body armor. Somehow I thought that massive gray sweatshirt could hide that fact that I had gotten so big. I wished it could just make me invisible.

Desperate to make a change before I turned 40, I decided it was time to do SOMETHING about my weight. During the holiday break, I bought Groupons to three different gyms or fitness programs. I was grasping at straws, but I didn't really have a plan. Then one day, a customer of mine told me about a program she was in . . . an extreme body-shaping program. Well extreme body shaping was definitely what I needed! She showed me her before/after pictures, and told me that she had won \$1,000 by having the biggest transformation during her session. I looked at her 'before' picture, and it looked JUST LIKE ME. She told me if she could do it, I could do it . . . that they would give me all of the tools I needed to succeed. It was a lot more expensive than the Groupons I had just bought. It sounded a lot harder. It was a much bigger risk. I might fail . . .

The next day, I drove over to Farrell's eXtreme Bodyshaping to sign up. I didn't even know when their office hours were, or when the next session started. I just got in my van and took a chance. I walked in and (groan) immediately saw someone I knew. Someone in MUCH better shape than me! I was embarrassed, but put on a brave face. Said I was ready. Said I was going to do it. Acted much more self-assured than I felt. Then I turned to Alycia, paid her the fee that I really couldn't afford, and told her (with much more bravado than I actually felt), that I was not only going to finish my 10-week challenge, I was going to win the \$1,000 prize.

What happened next was that all of the pieces started clicking into place. The \$1,000 prize lit my competitive spirit, and I hadn't had a fire burning in me for a very long time! The workouts got me moving and started to build the muscle tone and cardio fitness that I had lost over the years. The six-day-a-week schedule gave me the structure I needed

to make fitness part of my daily routine. The coaches and teammates gave me the accountability I needed to make me roll out of bed every morning, even when I really didn't want to. As my fitness improved, I started to feel more like an athlete again. The more athletic I felt, the more I wanted to move, do more, be better, push myself. I started biking in the evening and jogging a bit. I was controlling my food instead of it controlling me ... measuring, counting, weighing and planning my meals. I felt empowered by the knowledge, structure and support I received through the Farrell's program and people.

Ten weeks rolled around I won my gym's \$1,000 prize for the biggest transformation! In only 10 weeks, I looked like a new person. I still had a long way to go, but the fire had been lit, and I had all the tools I needed to succeed. At the party, when they announced me as the winner, I declared that I was now going to win the \$10,000 one-year prize. I believed in myself, like I never had before. I would use my competitive nature and the Farrell's program to help me set and achieve higher goals than I'd ever set for myself before.

From that moment, I kept my eye on the goal ... total transformation and winning the prize. Why? Because winning the prize would be awesome, but mostly because doing what was necessary to win would also mean accomplishing all of my other health and fitness goals along the way. I'd get down to my ideal body weight and feel great in my clothes, increase my strength, and in doing so, reduce my aches and pains caused by my weight and lack of fitness, regain my "fighting spirit" ... that spark in me that had been dwindling, but burned stronger and stronger as I became more athletic and physically capable.

I decided to try for perfect attendance for the entire year. I started running the 2.5 miles to and from class, just to make the most out of my early morning workout time. I joined every FIT challenge with the intention of winning, because I knew that by trying to win, I would push myself harder. I set high goals for myself at every testing ... trying to double some numbers, or cut others in half. I signed up for a full marathon, even though I'd never run a race of any length, EVER. Why? Because I knew I could get there. I knew that I could achieve any goal I set for myself, as long as I put in the work. I BELIEVED in myself. For the first time in 20 years, I BELIEVED in myself.

THAT'S how Farrell's has changed my life. I was a 39-year-old overweight, sad, embarrassed mother of four who didn't really believe she was anything special. One year and 10 weeks later, I'm a 40-year-old fit, athletic, energetic and vibrant woman. I believe I am special. I believe I can accomplish anything I set my mind to. My life isn't covered in a dull gray cloud anymore. I'm not dull and gray anymore. I'm bright and shiny and colorful now, and thanks to the tools given to me by Farrell's, I'm making my life extraordinary.

After I had finished the competition's physical measurements and photos for this one-year transformation, my family asked me if I was going to continue getting up every morning to work out now that I was "done". Without hesitation, I said,

“ABSOLUTELY! Farrell’s is where my friends are. It’s what I look forward to every night when I go to bed. IT’S MY HAPPY PLACE!” And, truly, it is. From the moment I walked in the door, the people at Farrell’s saw me for what I could be. They believed in me, and that’s how I, in turn, began to believe in myself again. Being fully whole ... being ME again ... is a very happy place to be.

Erica Thompson, Farrell’s eXtreme Bodyshaping 2013 National Challenge Winner